

READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT BY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF ECONOMIC GROWTH & NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES

TO:	Housing, Neighbourhoods and Leisure Committee		
DATE:	4 January 2023		
TITLE:	Domestic Abuse and Safe Accommodation Strategy 2023 - 2026		
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1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 This report introduces the Domestic Abuse & Safe Accommodation Strategy 2023 - 2026, which has been produced in collaboration with Reading's Domestic Abuse Partnership Board. The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 placed new statutory requirements on local authorities to:

- Assess the need for domestic abuse support in their area for all victims who reside in relevant safe accommodation, including those from outside their area.
- Prepare and publish a strategy for the provision of such support to cover their area having regard to the needs assessment.

1.2 A comprehensive strategic assessment has been conducted which has informed the strategy and will be used to inform the commissioning of new safe accommodation provisions and support services as a result of current contracts coming to an end.

1.3 Appendix A - Domestic Abuse & Safe Accommodation Strategy
Appendix B - Priorities Consultation - Response summary
Appendix C - Equality Impact Assessment

2. RECOMMENDED ACTION

2.1 That Housing Neighbourhoods and Leisure Committee endorses and adopts the new Domestic Abuse and Safe Accommodation strategy.

3. POLICY CONTEXT

3.1 Reading's current Domestic Abuse Strategy ends this year, as do the contracts for commissioned services to provide refuge spaces and non-refuge support services. This, coupled with the statutory duties set out in the Domestic Abuse Act 2021, which requires the council to assess the needs and develop a strategy within safe

accommodation and plans to ensure the provision of support for victims and their children, has resulted in the development of a new strategy that encompasses a strategy for safe accommodation, which will inform the commissioning process for a new refuge provision and non-refuge support services contract.

3.2 In addition to these requirements, a duty was placed upon local authorities to form a Local Partnership Board, to act as a consultation board for specified functions. Reading's existing Domestic Abuse Steering Group was formally renamed to become Reading's Domestic Abuse Partnership Board at the beginning of 2022 and set new terms of reference to ensure compliance with the Act. The Board is a subgroup of Reading's Community Safety Partnership, which provides scrutiny over the board's activities.

3.3 A comprehensive Needs Assessment was undertaken in the spring of 2022 to understand the needs of victim survivors in relation to safe accommodation and support. The identified needs have shaped the priorities, which are set out as follows:

- Effectively commission refuge and other Safe Accommodation spaces.
- Raise awareness about Domestic Abuse.
- Engage with those in diverse communities experiencing abuse with a view to encourage trust to remove barriers to access support services and supporting victim survivors to view seeking help early.
- Develop and support a multi-agency approach to working with an array of groups, inclusive of perpetrators, victim survivors (irrespective of gender/sexuality identity).
- Continue to safeguard and advocate for all children who have witnessed or experienced domestic abuse

3.4 A public consultation to seek views about the proposed strategy priorities was undertaken between 25th July and 5th September 2022, which consisted of an online survey. The overview of responses is set out in appendix B.

3.5 The Domestic Abuse Partnership Board has worked collaboratively to develop this Strategy (appendix A), which ensures the needs of all victim-survivors of domestic abuse and their families, both within safe accommodation and the community, are considered and this is reflected in the strategy's priorities. The Domestic Abuse Partnership Board is currently writing an action plan to accompany the strategy, which will be published when the strategy is launched.

3.6 The Domestic Abuse Partnership Board and wider Community Safety Partnership acknowledges that this strategy is being published at a time when public finances are considerably impacted and when there are resourcing challenges across the partnership. Both factors impact on the partnership's response to tackling Domestic Abuse and supporting victim-survivors, however, in response to these challenges, the Partnership is committed to developing a realistic and achievable delivery plan and to ensure more effective, efficient and collaborative use of the resources each agency has to reduce harm caused by domestic abuse.

4. THE PROPOSAL

4.1 It is a statutory requirement for the Council to assess the needs and develop a strategy which sets out its local response to providing support within safe accommodation and plans to ensure the provision of support for victims and their children.

4.4 It is proposed that the Strategy will be launched on 5th January 2023.

4.5 The completion of the needs assessment and the development of the strategy is providing officers with the foundations to commence a procurement and commissioning exercise to ensure that new and appropriate services are commissioned as the current

contracts end. An interim contract has been put in place with the current provider, Berkshire Women's Aid, which will run until 30th June 2023, to allow for the commissioning process to be carried out, now that the strategy has been finalised.

5. CONTRIBUTION TO STRATEGIC AIMS

5.1 Reading Borough Council's vision is:

To help Reading realise its potential - and to ensure that everyone who lives and works here can share the benefits of its success.

This area of work will contribute towards the Thriving Neighbourhoods and Healthy Environment priorities, with a focus on reducing domestic abuse and addressing the issues around providing safe accommodation to those people and their children who are affected by domestic.

Reducing the impact of Domestic Abuse has an impact of both the Health and Wellbeing and Community Safety agendas of the Council and partners.

6. ENVIRONMENTAL AND CLIMATE IMPLICATIONS

6.1 There are no environmental or climate implications arising from this report.

7. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND INFORMATION

7.1 The priorities for the Strategy have been consulted on through a public consultation, which was conducted between 25th July and 5th September 2022.

8. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

8.1 An Equality Impact Assessment has been completed (appendix x) in respect to the draft strategy. It is considered that the priorities within the strategy could have positive differential impact on groups with the following protected characteristics:

- Racial
- Disability
- Gender
- Sexuality
- Religious belief

7.2 No Negative impact was recorded on any group.

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

9.1 This Strategy enables the Council to meet its statutory duties under the Domestic Abuse Act 2021.

10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

10.1 The Council has in place a budget which is allocated to the costs for refuge provision and non-refuge support services.

10.2 New Burdens Funding was allocated to the Council for the period of 2022-2023 to the amount of £342,933 to support Reading with its delivery of the new Domestic Abuse Act. This funding will be used in addition to the funding already committed by the council to ensure the needs identified by the Domestic Abuse & Safe Accommodation Needs Assessment have been met.

11. BACKGROUND PAPERS

11.1 Reading's Domestic Abuse Strategy 2019 - 2022.